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STATE DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

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SUBJECT: "FRIENDS OF DEMOCRATIC CUBA" INSPIRE ACTIVISTS,
ANNOY EURODIPS

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Classified By: COM Michael Parmly for Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Cuban pro-democracy activists got a boost from the May 24 conference call with the "Group of Friends of Democratic Cuba," a loose alliance of US Representatives, European diplomats in Washington, prominent members of the Miami exile community and others. One of the activist participants, Martha Beatriz Roque, plans to hold a follow-up meeting June 5 with the Slovak Ambassador to Cuba. The European envoys in Washington expressed strong solidarity with the activists and told them it is only a matter of time before freedom comes to Cuba. European reps in Havana like the idea in principle, but were blindsided by the May 24 event. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU/NF) Cuban pro-democracy activists tell us they are inspired by the May 24 conference call with the "Group of Friends of Democratic Cuba," an alliance of Cuba-focused US Representatives, European diplomats in Washington, prominent exile-community members and others. During the call, many at the Washington end expressed solidarity with the Cuban activists and indicated they would pressure the GOC to account for human rights violations. At the USINT end, participants included activists Martha Beatriz Roque and Nestor Rodriguez Lobaina; travel obstacles kept a third activist, Bertha Antunez, from participating. USINT staff, including COM, also took part. Members of the "Ladies in White," relatives of political prisoners, later expressed support for the event and the discourse it generated.

"WE ARE ON YOUR SIDE"

¶3. (SBU/NF) Washington-based diplomats who took part included the Ambassadors or DCMs of Hungary, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia. Roque and Lobaina made clear that their prime objective is the immediate liberation of political prisoners. Another goal, they said, is to halt the harassment of dissidents. The Czech official told the activists, "We are the worst news for your oppressor because we prove that success can happen. Our countries are now vibrant and free." The Slovak official said: "We are on your side. Here you see U.S. Congressmen and Ambassadors of democratic countries building a democratic coalition. We all need to do what we can, including at the UN and in terms of material support." The Lithuanian official wished the activists luck, reminded them that his country does not have an Embassy in Havana, and asked how Lithuanians could help.

"SEND SUPPORT THROUGH YOUR EMBASSIES"

14. (SBU/NF) Roque responded to the offer of assistance by requesting greater outreach by European embassies in Havana. She added: "Stan (Kazecky) from the Czech Republic was expelled. We have practically no contact with Hungary. We have had contact with Poland, even though its Ambassador has not yet been allowed in. We haven't yet had any contact with Slovenia, and we look forward to that." Roque also encouraged the Group of Friends of Democratic Cuba to send material support to Cuba's human rights community through their Embassies. "Also, Internet access is crucial. We have that here at USINT, but it would be great to have the other diplomatic offices do the same. We don't want Uncle Sam to be the only 'bad guy'." Lobaina, for his part, highlighted the ongoing repression of Cuban youth through the use of preventive detention. He said it is imperative to "fight Castro's disinformation... We need to inform people about the political prisoners and the oppression. We also need to break through to international media... The dictator should be isolated and condemned by the world."

"A MESSAGE TO THOSE LISTENING IN"

15. (SBU/NF) Toward the end of the conference call, the Hungarian official told the activists that the Friends would be "watching after you... I hope this sends a clear message to those listening in" on the call. Among the last words was that of the Slovak official, who told the activists that freedom can't be stopped. "We don't know if it will take two weeks, three months or a year, but it will happen."

DISCONNECT WITH HAVANA DIPS

16. (C) Roque told us that on June 5, she will meet with the Slovak Ambassador to Havana in the first of several

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high-level meetings following the conference call. However, both the Slovak and Polish Charges d'Affaires told P/E Counselor they were blindsided by the May 24 event, only learning about it later from Roque. The Polish Charge worried that publicity of this initiative would create tighter Cuban regime restrictions on outreach activities. The Slovak Charge was even more annoyed, and complained that Washington-based Ambassadors should not be making Cuba policy behind the backs of their colleagues on the ground in Havana. On the other hand, the Slovaks here were moving ahead with their Internet project. The Hungarian Embassy in Havana is the most disconnected - its Ambassador is a Castro sympathizer.

COMMENT

17. (C) The Czechs, Poles and Slovaks are the most active in reaching out to the dissidents. When we do this again, it might be useful to encourage the Washington and Havana Embassies of our friends to coordinate between and among themselves and their capitals.
PARMLY